

Thrifty measures fill mint director's suggestion box

By Roger Boye

Scores of collectors have sent a message to Washington: Issue sets of 1984 uncirculated coins in simple packaging to keep the cost down.

That basic suggestion and others arrived at the Bureau of the Mint in December, following an invitation made to coin buffs by mint Director Donna Pope to "let us know what you want." Pope recently released a summary of the comments she received to hobby newspapers Coin World and Numismatic News.

Some collectors complained that elaborate packaging took up too much storage space while others asked the mint to charge just \$5 per set or as little as possible. The government last issued uncirculated sets in 1981, asking \$11 each for coins with a face value of \$4.82.

Congress passed legislation in 1983 that, in effect, orders the mint to resume production of uncirculated sets this year. Pope said she would use the opportunity to "rethink the program from ground zero."

Collectors should know the results of her thinking by summer.

● Uncle Sam may soon modify some tax-reporting regulations it issued last year, much to the delight of thousands of coin dealers.

Under those 1983 rules, the Internal Revenue Service required coin dealers to obtain information from persons who sold them "bullion coins" such as Krugerrands or even common-date silver quarters.

The latest IRS proposal—which will be reviewed at a public hearing in late March—would exempt most coin transactions from the reporting requirements.

Many dealers contend that the 1983 rules generate excess paperwork and are illegal because the IRS had misinterpreted a federal law.

● Quick: Why is an uncirculated 1949-S Franklin half dollar 10 times rarer than a 1948, even though the 1949-S has a higher mintage? You'd find the answer in an unlikely place—the current issue of Rare Coin Review by Bowers and Merena Galleries Inc.

The company issues the review quarterly to advertise keepsakes for sale. Other large firms publish similar listings, but none are as useful as the Bowers and Merena booklet.

Each edition is an enjoyable read, even for the casual hobbyist who doesn't have a dime to spend on collectibles. For example, the company devotes more than a dozen pages in the current issue to advice for the novice, a question-and-answer forum and other articles worthy of slick hobby magazines.

Normally, Bowers and Merena charges \$3 a copy but will send the next edition, due out in eight weeks, free to collectors who ask. Write the company at Box 1224, Wolfeboro, N.H. 03894.